

Aurora-area bike sharing program gets boost from planning agency

 chicagotribune.com/suburbs/aurora-beacon-news/news/ct-abn-bike-regional-trails-st-1101-20171031-story.html

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A regional planning agency will give technical help to develop a regional bicycle and pedestrian program linking Aurora, Elgin, Naperville, Algonquin, McHenry and South Elgin, including more bike sharing stations.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning announced Tuesday it was awarding a technical assistance grant to the cities to develop the Regional Active Mobility Program.

The agency awards the technical assistance grants each year on a competitive basis to cities, counties or not-for-profit agencies that apply for them. The agency does not give out money, but rather personnel who assist local agencies with some kind of planning effort.

Aurora is in the finishing stage of an updated downtown master plan that was done with technical assistance from the agency.

One of the main parts of the Regional Active Mobility Program would be to expand the bike sharing program Aurora already has started with Zagster and make it regional to cover the bike trail system throughout the Chicago suburbs. Aurora started the program in 2016, with three places in the city where people can rent bikes and use them on the trail system, then return them at any of the three locations.

The program would seek to expand that kind of bike sharing throughout the entire system. It also would seek to expand the idea that people could get membership for bike sharing for continued use, not just a ride at a time.

But it also has two other elements – "wayfinding" and tourism.

The wayfinding part of the program would encourage activity by bike share members, runners, walkers and other bicyclists to get consistent and user-friendly design elements throughout all the communities. It would also encourage more activity among the groups as far as programming, education and opportunities for exploration.

Programming could include designated routes, fitness and commuter challenges, and walking or biking clubs. Education could include inspirational quotes, historical facts and health benefits listed on signage.

Mobility-based tourism — attractions centered around trails and other biking and walking amenities — holds a tremendous potential for economic development for communities in the area, according to agency officials.

The program could include strategies for leveraging the bike share and wayfinding components of the program to increase mobility-base tourism in the region. The approach is to develop a cohesive brand and marketing campaign, seek recognized designations such as "Trail Town" and "Bicycle Friendly Community," coordinate and collaborate on special events, and identify and help businesses and services that support mobility-based tourism, agency officials said.

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